



**Expeditionary Strike Group ONE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**ESG 1 Strikes from the Sea**

NORTH ARABIAN SEA – Fifteen individuals with possible links to the Al Qaeda terrorist network were detained, and an estimated 2,800 pounds of hashish with a street value of approximately \$11 million dollars was seized by units assigned to Expeditionary Strike Group 1 (ESG 1) following the interception of a dhow here Dec. 31.

Operating in conjunction with Australian P-3 maritime patrol aircraft, USS Peleliu (LHA 5), USS Port Royal (CG 73), USS Germantown (LSD 42) and elements of the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) conducted the takedown following indications that the vessel was involved in smuggling activities.

The Australian P-3 located and tracked the dhow as U.S. Naval forces prepared for the interception. ESG 1 boarding teams discovered the drugs underneath blocks of ice and in hidden compartments after scouring the vessel for 24 hours.

“This mission was perfectly suited to our capabilities, Rear Adm. Bob Conway, Jr., Commander, ESG 1, said. “We are designed to provide combatant commanders the flexibility to conduct operations across the spectrum of conflict. The immediate nature of this tasking challenged our ability to locate and take down the dhow on short notice. It really demonstrates the kind of speed to execution vital for missions of this kind,” Conway said.

This marks the third such takedown in two weeks by coalition naval forces, and the second by units assigned to ESG 1. USS Decatur (DDG 73) detained a dhow and its 12 crewmembers and seized upward of \$10 million in hashish Dec. 15; USS Philippine Sea (CG 58) detained two dhows and their 21 crewmembers and seized 95 pounds of heroin and 50 to 100 pounds of methamphetamines Dec. 20.

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DHOW 2/2/2

Ten of the individuals from those two takedowns have been transferred to a secure, undisclosed location for further questioning by U.S. officials; the remaining 23 crewmembers have been turned over to a country in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility, according to a U.S. Fifth Fleet statement.

ESG 1 is operating with coalition maritime forces in international waters in the Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/Commander, U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet area of responsibility in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

**Proposed Q & A - FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS USE ONLY**

Q1: WHERE ARE THE DHOW'S CREWMEMBERS NOW? DO THE CREWMEMBERS YOU DETAINED HAVE TIES TO AL QAEDA OR ANY OTHER TERRORIST NETWORKS?

A1: THE CREW IS IN U.S. NAVY CUSTODY, UNTIL THEIR DISPOSITION CAN BE DETERMINED BY U.S. AUTHORITY. IT IS UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME WHETHER THEY ARE MEMBERS OF ANY TERRORIST ORGANIZATION.

Q2. IS THERE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING THE INTERCEPTIONS MADE BY USS PHILIPPINE SEA AND USS DECATUR?

A2. 10 OF THE 33 CREWMEMBERS ORIGINALLY DETAINED HAVE BEEN FLOWN TO BAGRAM AIR BASE IN AFGHANISTAN AND WILL BE HELD FOR FURTHER QUESTIONING BY U.S. OFFICIALS. THE REMAINING 23 HAVE BEEN TURNED OVER TO OFFICIALS OF A COUNTRY IN THE REGION.

ONE OF THE TWO DHOWS SEIZED BY USS PHILIPPINE SEA BECAME UN-SEAWORTHY ON THE MORNING OF DEC. 23 AND SANK IN THE NORTH ARABIAN SEA. THERE WERE NO INJURIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LOSS OF THE DHOW. THE OTHER DHOWS HAVE BEEN TURNED OVER TO OFFICIALS OF A COUNTRY IN THE REGION.

AS FOR THE DRUGS SEIZED DURING THOSE OPERATIONS, A PORTION WAS KEPT FOR ANALYSIS AND AS EVIDENCE. THE REST HAS BEEN DESTROYED.

Q3. WILL THE DETAINED CREWMEMBERS REMAIN ABOARD U.S. NAVY SHIPS OR WILL THEY BE TRANSFERRED ELSEWHERE?

A3. THE CREWMEMBERS WILL REMAIN IN U.S. NAVAL CUSTODY UNTIL THEIR DISPOSITION IS DETERMINED BY U.S. OFFICIALS.

Q4: HOW MANY SHIPS WERE INVOLVED IN THIS TAKEDOWN?

A4: NAVY AND MARINE CORPS FORCES ASSIGNED TO EXPEDITIONARY STRIKE GROUP ONE WERE INVOLVED IN THE INTERCEPTION, AND INCLUDED USS PELELIU, USS PORT ROYAL, USS GERMANTOWN AND THE THIRTEENTH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAPABLE).

Q5. WHAT TIPPERS DID YOU RECEIVE TO INDICATE THAT THE VESSEL WAS TRANSPORTED DRUGS AND SUSPECTED TERRORISTS?

A5. COALITION FORCES HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL A VARIETY OF INTELLIGENCE RESOURCES TO IDENTIFY SUSPECT VESSELS. HOWEVER, DISCUSSING INTELLIGENCE GATHERING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS WOULD JEOPARDIZE CURRENT AND FUTURE OPERATIONS. WE WILL NOT DISCUSS THE TYPES OF INFORMATION OR INTELLIGENCE SOURCES USED TO MAKE THOSE DETERMINATIONS.